



# 39<sup>TH</sup> ENGINEER BATTALION ALUMNI NEWS



[www.39thengrbn.com](http://www.39thengrbn.com)

November, 2020

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

This year has been pretty much a disaster for some of us and for the rest very inconvenient. The one thing that Carolyn and I always look forward to was taken away; I am talking about seeing each of you at our annual reunion. No matter what was thrown at us, we always knew that we could look forward to the end of September and the first part of October being with old friends and meeting new ones.

Our hope is that each of you are weathering this and that your health and that of your family's is good. The hardest decision I had to make, and I am sure the same could be said for the other association officers, was to "postpone our 2020 reunion due to safety concerns".

We had a terrific reunion planned for this year in Dayton, but we decided to postpone until 2021 for the safety and health of all our members. Our hotel will remain the same and will have the same room rate as this year. We will still do our trip to the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force that I believe all will enjoy without tiring us out. We will be giving the Light Denim Long Sleeve Shirt with pocket and the 39th logo embroidered on the left front to members registered at next year's reunion.

The reunion will be from Wednesday, September 29 to Sunday, October 3, 2021. Our headquarters will be the Crowne Plaza Dayton Downtown, 33 East 5th Street with easy access off I-70 and will have the option of arriving 3 days before and staying 3 days later, if desired.

The association purchased an 8"x 8" memorial brick dedicated to the 39th to be placed at the entry of the new Army Museum which we will be visiting in 2022

while in Washington, D.C. for the 40th anniversary of "The Wall".

Now for a big "Blue Bull Welcome" to our new member. Welcome and we look forward to seeing you at one of our future reunions.

**NEW MEMBER** - Edward Taylor Jr., 39th 71-72

We held our second Memorial Service for all members who have passed at the Milwaukee reunion and we hope to be able to include the members we lost during our time in Vietnam at the upcoming reunions. If you have a member that you would like to have recognized, please send me an e-mail with the member's name, unit and dates served and their date of passing.

**DECEASED MEMBERS-** Joseph Frank Natale, D Co. 1967-1968 from Burtonsville, MD passed August 8, 2020. Benny "Jack" Mack Smith, C Co. 1967-1968 from Columbus, IN passed September 9, 2020. Arthur Harold Spengler Jr., A Co. 1968-1969 from Salisbury, NJ passed May 17, 2020. Obituaries are later in this newsletter.

As always, Carolyn and I wish each of you good health and prosperity and please stay safe during this trying time of COVID-19; we look forward to being able to be with you all in Dayton, OH in September 2021.

We wish you a Happy Thanksgiving and a Very Merry Christmas.

**BROTHERS THEN, BROTHERS NOW, BROTHERS FOREVER**

Bill Ray  
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## FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT

Veterans Day is coming up. Every year the Honor Guard goes to 5 grade schools and participates in programs. In the weeks before the programs, the schools teach about military service and sacrifice. There are poster contests and speech writing contests. Each program starts with the National Anthem and at the 3 Catholic schools, a prayer. After being recognized and songs being sung, a bell choir performs. These programs are so long that it takes 2 days for us to attend them. We are even served breakfast at one school and lunch at another. At the end of each program we go outside and the rifle squad fires 3 volleys and taps is played. But, not this year, since the schools do not want any big crowds coming into the schools.

By the way, did I mention that the public is invited? They fill one side of the bleachers in the gym while the other side is full of the students. We get to see a lot of good patriotic American Citizens. This year we will just have one program at our 150-year old Courthouse. Of course, it will be at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.

My grandfather, Miller was a truck driver in WWI and was gassed. He came home and lived long enough to marry my grandmother and father 3 children, with my mother being the oldest. He died from lung problems when my mother was a sophomore in high school. Although I never knew him, I think of him every Veterans Day. My father was in the Navy, submarines in WWII.

John Lewis

C & D Co.

39th Cbt En Bn 1971

## FROM THE SECRETARY

Hi all. What a year we have had! Hoping you are all staying safe, wearing your masks, washing your hands and keeping your distance. Wish I could tell you that we did nothing all year, but Sandy has been busy crocheting like crazy and I have read more books than ever before while recovering from 2 carpal tunnel surgeries. All good and we didn't kill each other with all the together time we had.

We are sending our first grandchild off to serve in the Air Force (where did I go wrong?) on Veterans Day. She is so excited to begin this new chapter in her life. This is the third generation of Lewis' in military life.

While we missed this year's reunion, be assured that Bill and I are still busy working on the next one – again in Dayton, Ohio. Dayton is a lovely town and we are especially excited to visit the Air Force Museum. Wear comfortable shoes because it is four buildings big with an array of military equipment and exhibits.

You might want to take a little side tour of the Carillon Park, its brewery and grounds. There is also the Wright Brothers home and museum....all within a few minutes of our hotel.

Wishing you all a safe end of this miserable year and high hopes for a better 2021.

Jim and Sandy Lewis

Secretary/Reunion co-chairs

## FROM THE HISTORIAN

After more than two decades of active planning, more than four years of construction, and a last-minute delay imposed by the current public health emergency, the United States Army announced on October 13, 2020 that the National Museum of the United States Army will open its doors to the public on **Veterans Day, Wednesday, November 11, 2020. The Museum will be open from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm daily, 364 days a year.** (The Museum will be closed on Christmas Day.)

The Museum is the first comprehensive and truly national museum to capture, display and interpret more than 245 years of Army history, and it will bring that history to life in times of war and times of peace, as told through the eyes and the stories of America's soldiers.

The Museum is located on the public grounds of Fort Belvoir, in Fairfax County, Virginia, not far from George Washington's Mount Vernon, and is easily accessible via the Fairfax County Parkway and nearby highways. Admission to the Museum will be free, as will parking.

The construction of the Museum was a massive

undertaking. The 185,000 square foot building stands 100 feet high and is covered with almost one million pounds of stainless steel cladding, reflecting the surrounding wooded hillside and symbolizing the strength of the American soldier.

“The US Army and the American soldier forged the birth of our Nation,” noted Secretary of the Army Ryan D. McCarthy in announcing the Museum's opening date. “The Museum will be a place for members of the total Army family to gather and share their stories, while also creating an opportunity for visitors to connect with our Nation's history through the eyes and voices of individual soldiers.”

The museum will be on the 39th Association schedule when we are in D.C. in 2022.

Jerry Bright

Historian

A Co. & HHC 68-69

## **COVID-19 AND STOLEN VALOR**

While the horrible pandemic of COVID-19 has brought out many heroic acts of courage, unfortunately it has also fostered despicable ones of deceit. Among the most egregious are those related to what is referred to as “stolen valor”. This is a term applied to the phenomenon of people falsely claiming military awards or badges they did not earn, service they did not perform, Prisoner of War experiences that never happened, and other military derring-do that exist only in their minds. Some phonies with zero military experience completely fabricate their stories. Others who actually served choose to embellish their record of an otherwise unremarkable career.

First, and surprisingly, it is important to understand that it is NOT a crime to simply claim an award or claim military service when there was none. These are protected by the first amendment, the freedom of speech. Misleading statements made by politicians, teachers, actors, and other famous personalities may be considered immoral, but not illegal. This was a loophole many offenders used to facilitate their actions.

The original Stolen Valor Act of 2005 was created to address the problem but had limitations. That legislation was replaced with a revised act in

2013 that tackled the issue under a new pretext. It added the caveat that if those claims are for monetary gain or some other measurable, tangible profit, it can be considered punishable fraud.

During the pandemic, there has been a surge in false claims of military service to qualify for benefits and loans related to COVID-19. Now, thanks to more stringent laws, these offenders can be prosecuted for their crimes. And these are not just crimes against the government, they are crimes against every decent individual who served in the military. Hopefully, a measure of justice will be meted out to anyone using the military for such contemptible actions.

And on a final note – I am one of the few remaining folks who subscribes to our daily newspaper. Partly due to the \$250 per year cost and partly to the fact many like to read “online”. I prefer turning pages. I also peruse the comic section and a “Beetle Bailey” strip caught my eye. For anyone not familiar with Private Bailey, a Google search will alleviate that situation. Anyway, the strip had a fellow soldier asking Beetle that if he disliked the Army so much why did he stay in? His reply was “I don't have to get a “real job”! I take issue with that premise and submit there are few other professions that can be considered more of a “real job”!

Respectfully submitted –

Mike Shaw

Member at Large

## **FROM THE CHAPLAIN**

Hello brothers and sisters, I hope that all of you are well and getting through this very tough and troubling time we have been living through since March. New York City, where I live, has gone through great turmoil and as a result, almost two million people have left NYC in search of better living conditions in other cities and towns around America. However, with all of this going on throughout the United States today, what I miss the most, besides toilet paper, is our yearly Reunion with all of you.

For me, it is a time to reconnect and share our fellowship and brotherhood in a way that is almost impossible with those who have never experienced

what we have. The bonds we forged as Vietnam Veterans and especially 39thers is something others will never understand. The time we spend together at Reunions is like a release valve for each of us since we can express ourselves openly with each other.

The following is taken from an anthology of poems by my dear friend and warrior buddy G. W. Thomas, "Grub Worm" as his family and friends called him. I think all of us can relate to his following reflection.

*"In the wee hours of morning when everyone else is fast asleep, once again I live and flourish and am young again. It's during that time that I finally find peace of mind and spirit. Once again, my mind is clear and my thoughts are of pure reflection of what is and was. The time of almost exhaustion where one is not quite asleep or awake. That's when my mind travels back to look upon the days gone by. Then to see the young, strong, carefree man I was. To remember the days of war that will forever weigh upon my mind with a vice-like grip to let me live in anguish. The sounds, the flashes of light upon a darkened sky and blastings that followed. Wondering how many must die tonight before dawn. Will I ever see my loved-ones again? The sweat and fright of what is to be. Will I be next? Where are the little devils; it's so dark tonight. Why can't it be a full moon; won't someone shoot up a flare or something? Come on you bastards I'm ready for you. You may get me but I'll take a bunch of you with me, you can bet on that. Whattttttt ---- Oh, honey I'm sorry; I was dreaming again. I guess I'll get up and make coffee. It's time I was up anyhow. I'm so tired this morning – what a lousy night it was. Perhaps today will be better, Good morning Lord."*

Fr. Vasilios (Billy) Bassakyros  
Chaplain

## OBITUARIES



**Joseph Frank Natale**, age 73 of Burtonsville, Maryland, passed away on August 8, 2020 at Casey House/ Montgomery Hospice, from lung cancer. He was the husband of Shelia Kay Bowyer Natale. They met in 1969 and their deep love was a true Love Story. They shared 51 years of marriage together.

Born in New Castle, Pennsylvania, on February 8, 1947, he was the son of Frank Anthony Natale and Stella Clara D'Errico Natale. He served in the United States Army where he fought in Vietnam earning many medals and awards. He loved his country and remained a dedicated American throughout his life.

Joseph was the President of ABA PRODUCTIONS and was the Musical Director/Composer for music performed by his Jazz band PROJECT NATALE – recording five CD's of which he was the composer of the music, as well as the creator of the art work for the CD covers: Pyramids and Palms, Silver Plaza (live concert in Silver Spring), Shine Christmas Tree, Links and Endangered Liberties. PROJECT NATALE performed at a variety of venues throughout Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania and Washington D.C.

Joseph was also a Music Educator and taught many students over the years. He was highly loved and respected - considered a Genius in the music industry and a Master of Jazz.

Family was very important to him and he was always ready and willing to help, guide and assist family members. He could do anything – so very wise and talented that he was given the title within the family of "PROFESSOR". He enjoyed cooking especially Italian dishes he learned from his loving mother, gardening and doing home projects.

He is survived by his sister Frances Mohar of Viera, FL; his brother Louis Natale and wife Elizabeth of Burtonsville, MD; and his brother Frank Natale and his wife Rose Ann of Pittsburgh, PA. He also is survived by four nieces: Brenda Tomabene Weston of Viera, FL; Terri Micco of Struthers, OH; Rhonda Micco of Elyria, OH and Kellie Davis of the Poconos, PA; Arthur Micco, Jr. of Mt. Jackson, PA, and John Marmo of New Castle, PA and eight great nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by his father, Frank Anthony Natale (1983), his mother, Stella Clara D'Errico (2008) and his sister Christina Ligas (2009).

Memorial donations may be made to the American Lung Association, 1331 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW., Ste.#1425, Washington, DC 20004 ([www.lung.org](http://www.lung.org))



**Benny "Jack" Mack Smith**, 73, of Columbus, GA passed from this life on Wednesday, September 9, 2020 at 8:50 p.m. at his residence.

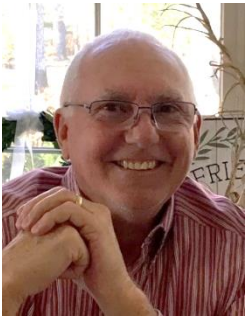
Mr. Smith was born on May 9, 1947 in Seymour, IN the son of Benny Engle and Sally Irene Smith Eglen. On April 28, 1972 he married Virginia A. Mullis.

Mr. Smith proudly served in the United States Army and had worked at Golden Foundry in maintenance. He was a member of the VFW and had previously served as a commander. Jack enjoyed Bob Ross Paintings, doing crossword puzzles in the paper, playing cards and always enjoyed making people laugh with a good joke but, above all he had a tremendous love for his family.

Survivors include his wife of 48 years, Virginia A. Smith of Columbus; children, Toni Smith of Columbus and Benji Lee (Jessica) Smith of Columbus; son-in-law, Mike Lyle of Columbus; grandchildren, Brittany (David) Cameron, Breanna (Josh Brooks) Hash, Corey Hash, Alex Smith, Benji Smith Jr., Ethan; great grandchildren, Breanna Cameron, David Matthew Cameron, Arianna Mead, Isaac Brooks; and his sister, Kathy (Michael) Ortiz of Louisville, Kentucky. He was preceded in death by his parents and a brother, Thomas Mullins.

Burial was at Garland Brook Cemetery with military graveside rites performed by the Bartholomew County Honor Guard.

Memorial contributions may be given to the charity of donor's choice. Online condolences and special memories may be shared with the Smith family at [barkesweaverglick.com](http://barkesweaverglick.com).



**Arthur Harold Spengler, Jr., 71,** passed away unexpectedly, yet peacefully, on Sunday May 17, 2020. Born on September 22, 1948 in Neptune, NJ, he was the only child to the late Arthur H. Spengler, Sr and grandson of the late Emilie Franz Spengler. Art was a beloved husband, father, and grandfather.

Art spent his youth at the beach in Bradley Beach, NJ. He was a competitive swimmer and enjoyed years as a lifeguard at Sandy Hook and Bradley Beach. He loved body surfing and longboarding, especially in the big waves of hurricanes. He listened to the 50's Doo Wop coming from the golden pavilions on the boardwalk, thus beginning his love of the Oldies.

He graduated from Asbury Park High School in 1966 and afterwards attended Goldey-Beacom College in Wilmington, DE. Art is also a veteran of the Vietnam War, having honorably served as a combat engineer in the United States Army with the 39th Engineer Battalion.

His time with his children brought him the most joy. Raised in Bradley Beach, NJ and Bloomsburg, PA, Art's five children learned their excellent work ethic from his example, which has led them to great success in their adult lives. Whether sledding, skiing, or spending time at the beach, he was a dedicated father full of love and pride for his children.

Art was a master plumber who could solve any problem and never shied away from a challenge. His entrepreneurial spirit led him to great success in his businesses - Art Spengler Quality Plumbing and Heating in Bloomsburg, PA and most recently Affordable Plumbing in Salisbury, MD.

He was an honest and down-to-earth guy, known for his knowledge, fairness, and excellent craftsmanship.

While in Salisbury, Art found and married the love of his life, Susan Chandler Spengler. Susan and Art enjoyed 19 wonderful years together, taking trips in their camper, playing at the beaches from NJ to FL and loving life as best friends

and perfect soulmates. Many remarked that they were the best things that ever happened to each other.

Art is survived by his loving wife, Susan Spengler, and five children from a previous marriage: Julie Lewellyn, husband Jim, and grandchild Jared Lewellyn; Pamela Spengler and grandchildren Jordan and Brandon Dykes. Marianne Spengler and husband Christopher Twilley; Bradley Spengler and wife Cathrine; Brett Spengler and wife Maira. He is also survived by step-daughter Blair Heckel, husband Chris, and grandchildren Katie and Storm. Last, but not least, he is survived by his dogs, Lucky and Daisy.

The family would also like to thank all PRMC healthcare workers for their exceptional care and kindness, including the ICU and respiratory staff and the OR team.

Per Art's request, his remains were cremated and scattered in one of his favorite places. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in honor of Art's cousin and best friend, Jack Wright, a fallen police officer. Checks should be made to: Bradley Beach Lifeguards addressed to Jack Wright Ocean Mile Swim c/o Dick Johnson, 306 Evergreen Ave, Bradley Beach, NJ 07720.

## A MEMORY

Sharon Anne Lane Killed by Hostile Fire  
312th Evac Hospital, Chu Lai, Viet Nam  
June 8, 1969

1Lt. Sharon A. Lane's name is etched on panel 23W line 112 of the Viet Nam Memorial Wall. She was the only American Service woman to die as a direct result of enemy action. Her story is movingly told in Philip Bigler's book "Hostile Fire: The Life & Death of First Lieutenant Sharon Lane".

I became interested in her story after learning where she was killed and a modest relationship I felt. The 122mm rocket that slammed into her ward at the 312th Evac Hospital on June 8, 1969 clearly was a factor in one of my early projects after arriving in September.

The 3rd platoon, D Company was assigned to build M8A1 steel airfield matting revetments at the 27th surgical hospital also at Chu Lai main base. Both hospitals had a similar configuration with the wards extending off two sides of a long connecting hallway.

Though a different hospital, I believe due to their similar configuration, both were provided with the sand-filled revetments to give additional protection to the wards from any further indirect enemy fire. Last November, I visited the Wall taking a picture of her name and mourning her loss coming less than two months in country. She had volunteered to go to Viet Nam and holds this singular female sacrifice.

Steve Rideout, D Co. 69-70



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**2021**  
**39TH ENGINEER**  
**ALUMNI ASSOCIATION REUNION**  
**29 SEPTEMBER 2021 – 3 OCTOBER 2021**  
**DAYTON, OHIO**

Save the dates! Room rates are \$119.00 with 3 days before and after the reunion available at the same rate. The Crowne Plaza is easy access off I-70 and airlines into Dayton International Airport include Allegiant, American, Delta and United. There are several non-stop flights out of major hubs. Our hotel offers a free shuttle.

Some attractions include the Air Force Museum, Carillon Park, Packard Museum, 2nd St. Market, Wright Brothers Memorial and Hawthorn Hill.